



*Government of Bermuda*  
**Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors**

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

by

The Hon. Tinée Furbert, JP, MP

**Big Up Yaself National Mini-Youth Conference 2026**

**Wednesday, 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2026**

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**Mr. Speaker,**

I rise today to inform Honourable Members and the public about the Office of Youth Affairs (TOYA) Big Up Yaself National Mini-Youth Conference that took place on January 29 -30, 2026. This event has proven annually to be an important opportunity for TOYA to connect with Bermuda's youth on issues that are important to their lives and development.

**Mr. Speaker,**

One of the potential dangers we see young people encounter, especially during their pre-adolescent and adolescent years, is their access to the internet, especially social media. As we are aware young people of all ages are drawn to screentime, whether it is watching television; using a tablet, computer or mobile phone the internet and the devices that provide access to it have become the preferred option of entertainment.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The internet can be a very valuable tool for young people providing access to vital resources for students, but it also allows young people to socialize and entertain themselves while exploring their world. For all the positives however, the internet

can be a dangerous place for young people. Although they may be fluent in their use of the internet, young people can be unaware of the real threats that exist online. There are predators, people who harm young people, and bullies who attack young people because of their own personal shortcomings.

There are people who share misinformation to create chaos and influence other's thinking and behaviour. Even the sites and applications that young people visit can be a threat to them by stealing their time and attention away from activities that are required or are of more benefit to them. As adults, we must protect our young people from the risks posed. More importantly, we must support our young people in making the right decisions so that they are not susceptible to these menaces that most certainly exist online. TOYA was able to share this information at the third annual Big Up Yaself National Mini-Youth Conference as the theme focused on online spaces and its impact on youth mental health. Also, I commend the Minister of Education for taking the bold, but necessary step of banning phones during the school day.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Big Up Yaself conference focused on the development of Bermuda's young people and ensuring their awareness of the 8 National Youth Policy Goals. The goals are the areas in which young people, youth organizations and the government agreed are critical for young people to have to positively support them in their transition to adulthood. Centered on Goal 1 - Keeping young people safe and protected from harm, the theme for this year's event, "Protect your Peace" encouraged students to be mindful of their online behaviours and its impact on their mental health. This included attention to the internet sites they visited, the time they spent online and how they interacted with others while online.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The first day of the conference was for our senior school students and the second day was for primary and middle school students. Over 200 students were reached on a topic of grave importance to all Bermuda's youth.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The voices of our youth are critical to the understanding and resolution to issues our youth experience. TOYA believes that it is imperative that their thoughts, insights and perspectives be captured at any event TOYA hosts. The Big Up Yaself Conference is one of the ideal events to capture this information. All students were asked about their online habits to gather data. However, while this is not a scientific statistical sample of the island, it provides insight into TOYA's Youth Development Team.

**Mr. Speaker,**

I wish to share a few results from that day because the online habits of our youth are important. Also, parents and guardians must be aware. TOYA asked all attendees of the National Mini-Youth Conference how much time they spent on a screen.

At the senior school level 65% of students spent more than 5 hours a day on a screen with 78% of that time on social media. Of these same students, 70% reported that their parents or guardians did not monitor their screen time.

At the middle school level there was more of a balance with 37% of students spending 0 – 2 hours on a screen with 32% spending more than 5 hours. However, 42% of students stated their parents or guardians did not monitor their screen time.

At the primary level 61% of students said they spent more than 5 hours a day on a screen and 78% of students said their parents did not monitor their screen time.

**Mr. Speaker,**

This information is real data from our young people. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry recommend no more than 2 hours per day of screen time use for children ages 6 – 15. Researchers from the University of California, San Francisco in a recent study said young people's addiction to social media and video games is tied to a higher risk of developing mental health issues including suicidal behaviours. Young people's sleep, ability to pay attention, as well as their physical and social emotional well-being can also be impacted by spending too much time on

a screen. This says nothing of the actual content that our young people are viewing or who may be trying to access them. I urge parents and guardians to be vigilant. I cannot stress this enough, monitor not only your children's screen time, but also the content they are viewing. We must protect our children.

**Mr. Speaker,**

I want to thank the Youth Development Team at TOYA for hosting the Big Up Yaself National Mini-Youth Conference. They are providing a service to the country that is both timely and impactful. Also, I extend my appreciation to the facilitators of the conference namely the Family Centre, Solstice, Sloane Johnson, Carlos Santana, Dion the Creative, Teacher Telle, Litt-Really Fun, Mr. Photogenic and Miss Aalai Wolffe who performed her hit single 'DumDada' - for engaging our youth, and making this year's Big Up Yaself Conference a success.

**Thank you, Mr. Speaker.**